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CHURCH CHOIRS.

In my last article, I took it for granted, that male choirs would necessarily be surpliced. It might, however, be asked, "can we not get all the advantages of boy's voices, without the use of surplices!" In theory, the surplice makes no difference in the singing, etc.; but, practically, I think a choir of boys and men in their "coat tails," is an admitted failure. There is all the difference in the world between drilling a regiment of soldiers in every-day dress, and drilling them in uniform; and the same *principle* may be applied to choirs. I have never yet heard of a male choir, unsurpliced, which was a permanent success.

In organizing a choir for the performance of Divine Service, it is desirable to begin two or three months before their services are required in church. Twelve to sixteen boys form, with a good number of men, a satisfactory choir. Care should be taken not to have too many boys of the same age, as the breaking of a number of voices at the same time rather cripples the choir. Care should also be taken not to have too many voices of a similar quality (unless the quality is good). A strong, coarse, somewhat unpleasant voice may be very useful in filling up, but if the same voice is "repeated" too often, it gives a bad tone to the singing. When trying a voice I always like to hear the *full* power of the lungs. Some voices are very good when used moderately, but develop very unpleasant qualities when used with any force. Such voices should be rejected. One cannot, however, be very particular in this country, as to the voices. The ordinary voice is so unsatisfactory, and the amount of training so insufficient, that the sensible choirmaster will make the best of his chances instead of passing over fairly good voices, in the vain hope of getting specially good ones. In working up a permanent choral service, it may be well to commence gradually and learn each part perfectly. For instance, in a choral

communion service, the parts to be sung may be arranged in a simple way and thoroughly learnt, and the music gradually improved and made more elaborate, if desirable. At matins and evensong, the hymns and canticles may be taken up first, then the responses, and then the Psalms once a month, and so on until all is in good shape. Some such arrangement will, I think, be more satisfactory than trying everything at once, and doing nothing very well. If the practices are to be made interesting to the men, the boys should have a separate practice, when all the music should be thoroughly learnt. At the full practice the service will be tried over with men and boys; and after the boys have been dismissed, the men may spend a profitable half hour in trying their parts.

It is generally undesirable to correct the men, or try their parts while the boys are present. It seems almost self-evident that the list of music to be practised should be carefully prepared beforehand, but at the same time one often finds an organist coming without a programme, and half the practice hour is spent in choosing hymns for Sunday. In such cases, every adult member of the choir usually has a favourite hymn, which must be sung on the following Sunday. The choir master should allow no remarks on the music, or the behaviour of the boys, during practice. It is always found by experience that "nagging" boys is ruinous to the discipline. As I said before, there should be only one "head" to the choir.

The greatest care should be taken in selecting hymns. The custom of singing a hymn, because it is popular, or "goes well," or because some person asks for it, is a bad one. The Collect, Epistle, and Gospel should be studied, and hymns selected accordingly. If, as is often the case, the hymn-book does not supply a hymn which bears on the subject, one must exercise one's own discretion. It is desirable that one of the better class of hymns should be sung after the third collect. This is undoubtedly the place of honour, being the only place in the Daily Offices, where provision is made for any musical addition to the order of service. Such hymns as "Light's Abode," "O what the joy and the glory must be," etc., are samples of the class I refer to. The other hymns may be shorter, and as a rule I think people do not care for more than one long hymn in a service. There should, of course, be a reasonable variety, (combined with a general unity of subject), in the hymns. It is not advisable for instance to sing "Jerusalem the Golden," and 'For Thee, O dear dear Country,' in one service, although I have heard it done.